Converting of State property

772. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of TRIBAL AFFAIRS *be* pleased to state:

(a)whether Government are aware that a few self-proclaimed environmental groups are deliberately misrepresenting the Tribal Bill initiative as a move to convert state property into property of the tribals terming them as encroachers and criminals;

(b) whether sixty per cent of the country's dense forests are found around the Adivasi settlements which works as a hub for conservation of nature and critical for their cultural and material survival; and

(c) whether Government would ensure protection to the tribals who have an inalienable stake in the forests?

THE MINISTER OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS (SHRI P.R. KYNDIAH): (a) The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has been mandated to formulate a comprehensive Central Legislation to redress the historical injustice done to forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes by providing for clear assertion of their legal rights on land and other traditional forest rights. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has prepared a draft. "The Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, 2005", to provide a legislative frame for recognition of the aforementioned rights, in consultation with the concerned Ministries, including the Ministry of Law and Justice.

The bill was posted on the website of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs seeking comments/suggestions from the members of the public, the social activists, academicians, anthropologists, the experts working for the cause of environmental protection and welfare of tribal people and other stakeholders on the proposed legislation till 10.07.2005. The Ministry has received comments/suggestions from a large number of individuals/organizations, either supporting the Bill or opposing the same on various grounds.

(b) As per the State Forests Report, 2003, about 63% of dense forest cover of the country lies in 187 tribal districts.

(c) The proposed Bill is still a tentative draft Bill and to be finalized as per the established procedure taking views and comments received from the stakeholders into consideration.